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Finding Energy That's Green Enough To Go Around

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Floridians are becoming weary of the loud and conflicting messages they read about climate change.

We read that the rising world temperature, approximately 1 degree Fahrenheit over the past century, is the first phase of a dramatic future warming that could cause the oceans to rise by meters and to produce devastating storms. Other reports tell us that these predictions exaggerate the truth. A positive fact is that climate change's recent high profile has been a wake-up call for a vulnerable peninsular state with obvious reasons to be concerned.

Part of the debate is the fear that changing our energy use could stunt Florida's economic growth.

But Florida does not have to choose between a "green" energy policy and a "green" economy. There's enough green to go around.

A new state energy policy that considers the effects of energy use on the environment and the climate can have real benefits to our economy. Twenty-two other states already have formulated comprehensive plans that address climate change and energy use. They have found that the steps they are taking are likely to result in positive long-term economic advantages.

It is clear that Florida must get to work on its own plan so that new energy-saving industries can be developed by Floridians and in Florida.

The 2006 Florida Legislature created the Florida Energy Commission. The commission is working to expedite writing a climate change response plan for the Sunshine State. This will add to the many initiatives that already are underway in Florida by government and private citizens. The plans we make will change the way that Floridians use and think about energy for the next 50 years.

The Florida Energy Commission and its advisory groups are comprised of energy and climate scholars, environmental leaders, and industry experts who are meeting regularly. The next meeting of its Climate Change Advisory Group is in Tampa today at 5:30 p.m. at the Tampa Airport in the Tampa Aviation Authority's boardroom.

The agenda includes expert testimony on how to create a greenhouse gas inventory and how to structure a climate change response plan. Citizens are encouraged to attend and to voice their opinions to the Advisory Group.

The energy commission's December report will be the first set of annual recommendations to the Legislature as we respond to environmental, scientific and economic facts. These reports will propose specific legislation to address greenhouse gases such as methane and carbon dioxide, renewable energy, energy conservation, transportation, building design, energy supply, energy transmission and other topics. By implementing a plan that respects Florida's unique population, environment and economy, we can create jobs for Floridians, put out-of-state dollars in our pockets, promote energy cost savings and increase state revenue.

This is Florida's energy history in the making. The Florida Energy Commission invites citizens from Tampa and its surrounding areas to come out and be a part of it.

Todd L Sack, M.D., is chairman of the Climate Change Advisory Group for the Florida Energy Commission.